

Olde BP Rally

You'd have to be crazy!

What do you expect would cause a bunch of around 80 "crazies" to contemplate covering more than half the state of Victoria in a semi-geriatric rally car, to drive over some fairly ordinary tracks for up to 22 hours at a time while at the same time using the most inaccurate and ambiguous road map yet devised by man as a guide?

To anyone other than a Victorian or even a South Australian, this form of motoring madness is about as far away from modern day rallying as you can possibly get. It's a form of rallying from the dinosaur age, if you like. Yet navigational rallying is all about fun with a capital "F" and, despite being a brain-teasing pastime, is eagerly contested by said "crazies" simply because, like Mount Everest, it's there to be conquered. Try explaining the logic of navigational events to anyone brought up on route charts, special stage events and pace notes and you'd be wasting your time.

But if the enjoyment, frustration, pain and agony suffered by these same crazies (the term is used kindly) is any indication of their idea of rallying fun then navigational events are the ultimate buzz. In a state where navigation - the really hard, crystal ball-type navigation - still has a place (as it does to a lesser degree in South Australia) and is still able to attract those die-hards who would rather spend far less money on a 1500 kilometre marathon than on a 150 kilometre route charted sprint event, events of this nature continue to flourish.

This preamble hopefully goes some way towards explaining why 39 crews representing Victoria's most proficient navigators and drivers turned out for the recent Olde BP Rally, a 1500-plus kilometre jaunt around the state, organised by Bob Watson on behalf of the Historic Rally Association. Make no mistake - navigation-type people are a different breed to other rallyists. While some people get their fix bombing down a special stage at something approaching warp speed, the navigation crazies get high on finding unmapped roads, map errors and road realignments, staying up all night, enduring hours and hours crouched over maps in a rally car and generally trying to outsmart the director at his own game. Weird? No. Crazy? Maybe.

When the ARN team decided it was time they became involved in another facet of rallying, the intention was to build up a 105E Anglia for the event. Well, time



Pre-rally adjustments were made to most cars. Here the crew of a Volkswagen attend to some last minute tuning.

By Jeff Whitten

being at a premium, the project didn't get much past the initial preparation stage and the project was dropped (temporarily, at least) for our ever-reliable Mk.2 Escort.

The Anglia will have to wait for another day. (Mind you, after becoming very used to the power of a 2 litre engine, the thought of an 1198cc Anglia deep in the woods late at night doesn't inspire us too much). As luck would have it, the Olde BP was open to pre-1976 cars and, as our Escort was first registered on 15 December 1975, we scraped in by 16 days! And having read so much about long distance events over many years, we wanted to try the experience first hand.

Having a car used to doing fully route charted events, plenty of work was required to make the Escort ready for long distance navigation rallies. Provision had to be made for a second spare wheel, extra fuel needed to be carried for the 350km distances between refuels, a compass added, storage boxes fitted in to



The ARN team struggled through and took 10th outright after 1600km.

When you consider the distances involved, the spread out nature of the field (39 cars departing at 2 minute intervals then being allowed up to 90 minutes late time per division for excursions down wrong roads), accurate reporting becomes impossible. So instead

absolutely no idea but the picture would become a little clearer as time went on. Two maps were provided for navigators - Broadbents 150 kilometres around Melbourne and Broadbents Western Half of Victoria - with a scale of something

maps.

By the time we reached Meredith for our first scheduled refuel, our late time was slipping away quickly. We'd wrong-slotted up a few wrong roads and pulled a rear mudflap off after backing over it on one of these wrong roads but the car was performing strongly. It was still stinging hot in the car and we were getting even hotter under the collar trying to decipher instructions such as "Via 3 is located at a bend Swamp (blue letters). Enter from the east along 6 kms of unmapped road". Oh, yes, and "Note: the directors used 5 kms of unmapped road starting immediately before the bend in the yellow road just south of the "e" in Minnamite between Via 3 and control". Are you still with us? Hmm.

Even at this early stage, several crews had retired with car problems as the field moved steadily towards the refuel break at Hamilton. Out were Garth/Garth (VW), Nicholls/Leake (Austin 1800), Azzopardi/De Vaux (VW), Verschuur/Barnes (Mini), Howard/Lexton (Toyota) and Dyer/Vaux (Peugeot). It was now 2am and as our red Escort pulled into the service break, and we were eagerly awaiting a long stop while we gathered our thoughts and prepared for the next division.

The control official on the job quickly brought our dream undone. "You're due out in 10 minutes" was all he said. Hell, we'd already driven for 8 hours and we weren't even going to be given the luxury of a decent spell!

Reeling from the news, we quickly collected our new route instructions, climbed back into the car and prepared to get under

way once more. If you think it's easy being a navigator, try doing up your harness, putting your intercom on, getting into a jumper (the morning air was starting to get a little cool), eating a biscuit, swallowing a drink and working out the route for the next section - all at the one time!

We discovered that the next division would take us north through the Grampians (a range of rugged mountains) to another refuel break at Horsham - and morning when you're far from home and in enemy territory (so to speak), the daunting thought of being tail-end Charlie is surely not a very comforting one. We'd have to do something about being so far back in the field.

More unmapped roads, shire tracks and kangaroo-infested forests followed. If that wasn't enough, one section had no less than 3 gates on it - spread just far enough apart for the navigator to get his seat belt done up properly before the next gate appeared. Gil Davis/David Long got more than they bargained for when their Datsun 180B SSS, freshly acquired from Gil's wife specifically for the event, crashed into the back of another competitor's car in the thick dust.

The Datsun's distributor was smashed and there was some fairly serious damage done to both cars. Not to be outsmarted though, Davis managed to pull the bodywork off the front wheels, Super-glued the distributor back together and carried on in the event. Kim Harper had a rear axle break in his Twin Cam Escort, a legacy of the rough roads encountered around the Grampians.

By now the navigation was becoming extremely frustrating.



Rally director Bob Watson farewells the first car away from the start in Somerton.

carry not only extra clothing but food and drink to last the crew throughout the night.

Comfort and convenience were the requirements imposed by events such as these. The selection of cars was a matter of personal preference, based on previous experience and although this rally was not particularly rough or rugged, cars with long suspension travel, plenty of interior room and a strong, willing motor were considered desirable.

Any Peugeot would have been acceptable, a Volvo, Datsun 1600 or an old Holden similarly so and there were any number of these to be found in the entry list.

Because of the very nature of events like the Olde BP, an accurate blow by blow report is much more difficult to write than one on a special stage rally.

we'll attempt to relate the experiences of the ARN crew.

It was a stinking hot day in Melbourne - something like 36 degrees - when the 39 crews assembled at BP Somerton, waiting for the off. The entry list included some famous names from "the good old days" of trials and rallies such as previous Australian Champion driver Frank Kilfoyle (Datsun 240Z), ex-Ford works driver Ken Harper (Mustang) long distance expert George Reynolds (VW) and previous Victorian champion and London-Sydney Marathon expert Gil Davis (Datsun 180B SSS) as well as renowned navigators Tony Wunderlich, David Long, Mike Osborne and Graham Vaux.

The list of modern day navigators was equally awesome - the likes of Ross Runnalls, Phil Nicholas, Mark Laidlay, Phil Wylie, Graham Vaux and others were represented. Names like these - to the trials addicts at least - cause one to stand in awe. A bit like being in the presence of Tommi Makinen, for instance. Engineered by the unquenchable Bob Watson who, these days, puts more back into rallying than he ever got out of it (although that was considerable), the Olde BP began by heading west from the city towards Ballarat.

As car 39, we were immediately at a disadvantage in that controls were almost ready to close by the time we got there - our city-leaving navigational errors didn't help, either. What were we to encounter? We had

like 20 kilometres to the inch. Penalties of exclusion would be applied if other maps were found in the competing cars. Using maps like these wasn't going to be any picnic as you can appreciate.

Our route instructions, handed out a generous (?) 15 minutes before the "off" contained instructions for 10 sections, enough to get us to Hamilton, almost as far west that you can go in Victoria without getting bogged in sand. If we thought that getting out of Melbourne was a chore, then worse was in store as editor Jeff, masquerading as a navigator, tried to come to grips with the vagaries of one of Mr. Broadbent's less accurate



Ken Harper was one of the oldest drivers in the event, in one of the most unique cars: this Ford Mustang.

Olde BP Rally



Leading navigator Phil Nicholas plots his way around the course in the front of Graham Wallis' Peugeot.

Cars were churning up the dust as they drove up and down likely looking roads only to find that the same roads lead everywhere else but to the right control and a number of crews (yes, us included) were forced to enter control from the wrong direction simply to stay within late running time. Small villages and names on the map were passed in the very early hours of Saturday morning.

Through Cherrypool, Nurrabiel, Victoria Valley and Kanagulk, the director kept the pressure on the navigators. A pattern was beginning to emerge by now - McLaughlin/Floyd, Upton/Laidlay and Wallis/Nicholas were beginning to show a clean pair of heels to the rest. As if we needed any re-assurance, this trio would be the ones to beat. Pre-event favourites Naish/Runnalls were having a slow start, back in 7th place but could not be discounted.

By skipping a few vias and making up subsequent time, the ARN crew managed to get somewhere back on schedule by the time we reached Horsham. In fact we managed to find time for

ago".

We were glad we drove straight to the breakfast break at Hopetoun in the heart of the Mallee wheatbelt country. It enabled us to get there before any of the other competitors arrived and grab a half hour's sleep before breakfast. And judging by the tales of woe recounted by those who chose to tackle the sections around Jeparit, Rainbow, Outlet Creek and Lake Albacutya, we were glad that we had. Miles and miles of sand interspersed with salt lakes and bogs faced the harder crews, some spending their time de-bogging their cars just to stay in the rally. Remember, this was fun with a capital "F"! At this hour of the day we needed constant reminding.

Retirees by the time the field reached Hopetoun were Hartmann/Pickthall (Datsun 1600) who hit a kangaroo, Young/Byron (Austin 1800), Carr/Carr (Peugeot 504), Ballard/Bainbridge, Coffey/Wunderlich (Toyota Corona), McLaughlin/Floyd (Volvo) and Davis/Long whose 180B finally succumbed to the problems suf-

The first morning stage was one of the best of the whole rally, combining fast shire roads and a 5 kilometre, 2 wheeltrack rollercoaster blast into control over sandhills, salt pans and paddy melons. We managed to clean by a minute, much to our delight.

Following a refuel break at Sea Lake, 2 sections remained to sort out the field. A hard to find section of road had even the leading crews scratching their heads and the dust palls from half a dozen cars blasting up and down the wrong roads could be seen hanging in the air for miles around. Director Watson and Course Checker Lister had really done their homework on this one. Section 34 into Goschen was a little easier, despite requiring crews to use almost 10 kilometres of unmapped road.

It was now mid afternoon - 3 o'clock - and we'd been on the road for 21 hours so the thought of a good shower and a few hours sleep was looking very inviting. We took advantage of these facilities after booking into our motel at Swan Hill. Our decision to cut and run prior to Hopetoun



Peter Riseborough's Ford Cortina Mk 1 made its way through the field and had claimed fifth place by the end of the Olde BP Rally.

not only a toilet stop (very necessary after so long in the car) but a snack and a refuel. It was now 6.50am - the sun was starting to rise on the horizon and mega-fatigue was starting to set in.

Decisions had to be made - would we continue on to the breakfast stop or quit while we were still able to make coherent decisions? It was still a long way to the major rest halt at Swan Hill and even further back home, but what the heck. We'd come this far and looked forward to the event for so long we'd just have to keep going.

As it turned out we made a reasonable decision (for that hour of the morning anyway). We'd book into the first control but skip a few others after that in an effort to get further up the field and back where the action was. It had been no fun being told by every other control official that "the last car left here half an hour

ago". In addition the Triumph of Wilson/Alexander went out of late running time.

The very experienced Naish/Runnalls team were now leading the event, ahead of Wallis/Nicholas and Upton/Laidlay, but a fast charge through the pack was being made by Riseborough/Smith in a Mk.1 Cortina. The ARN Escort team had improved on their 29th outright placing at Hamilton to now lie in 12th - not bad as far as we were concerned.

Leaving Hopetoun at 11am after a leisurely breakfast served by the local football club, there remained another 300 kilometres to cover before we reached the rest break at Swan Hill to the east. It was going to be another stiflingly hot day in the car. A total fire ban was in force and the temperature was set to reach 36 degrees - just what we didn't need in this sandy, salty part of the world.

had been a good one - we were running amongst the top 10 cars on the road all morning and were able to make it into bed a couple of hours earlier than if we'd been running further back.

Terry Naish and Ross Runnalls (Datsun 1600) were now well in command but only by 30 points from Graham Wallis/Phil Nicholas (Peugeot 504) and Rob Devenish/Phil Wylie (Datsun 240Z).

We'd improved one place to be in 11th outright and we went to bed feeling well pleased. Our only problems in over 1000 kilometres had been a slowly deflating rear tyre and a missing mudflap.

With the previous night's Olde BP presentation dinner (a lavish affair with lots of previous BP winners in attendance) now behind us, the final day's sections loomed. It was hot again, another total fire ban and there was a long way to go. A stiff breeze helped

DIVISION 2 PAGE 7.

CONTROL 20.

Map: Broadbents 333 Western Victoria

Location: Junction of white and red map roads 4 scale kms SE of Depta Railway Station.

Entry: From the W.

Via:

- Exit Control 19 to the W. (Unmapped).
Note: The Directors went straight on at the Dimboola - Jeparit road. **Extreme Caution!!!** Rail crossing at this point.
- Junction of white and dotted map roads 6 scale kms WSW of Antwerp. Enter from the SSE. Exit to the W.
Note: Total distance of unmapped road to be used between Control 19 and Via 2 is 11.3 kms.
- Junction of white and dotted white map roads 4 scale kms E of the junction of white and red map roads 4.0 scale kms ENE of Glenlee. Enter from the S.
Information required: What is the name of the road running north at Via 3?
Note: The Directors used 2.9 kms of unmapped road between Via 2 and Via 3.

Helpful hint: There is an unmapped road between Glenlee and Woorack.

- Lorquon. Exit to the E.
Note: The Directors used 6.4 kms of unmapped roads between Via 4 and control.

Time Allowed: 65 mins

Distance: 92.8 kms

An example of the often ambiguous instructions for the Olde BP Rally.

clear the ever-present dust which would make conditions a little more pleasant but nobody was looking forward to the route through the infamous Heathcote goldfields where all but the very experienced would have problems of the navigational kind.

The first 2 sections out of Swan Hill were cancelled due to the presence of hundreds of duck shooters assembled there on duck season opening, so the route took crews south to Kerang, 330 kilometres were on offer today, with a refuel break at Elmore in the centre of the state.

Deserted country roads and tracks were the ideal setting for the last day of the Olde BP and a decent turn of speed could be maintained. Times were tight and it would only take a small indiscretion down a wrong road to make the required schedule impossible to achieve. And if anybody tells you that navigational events are slow, boring affairs for the driver, you should try one for yourself. With Peter at the wheel, we sat on 5500 rpm in top gear for considerable amounts of time and often only barely made it into control with seconds to spare, despite having an error-free run.

A tricky passage control at Muskerry brought even the best navigators undone, highlighting the vagaries of the map in use. On through Toolleen and Heathcote and more wrong roads for us, we were pleased to see the start of the final 2 sections that looked reasonably straightforward.

ward. Messing about on the 29 km section to Glenhope where the roads on the ground looked nothing like those shown on the map, we lost even more time, as did lots of others who were milling around, and dropped down through the field.

However, when it seems that all is lost and it's not worth going on, navigational events often prove that there's somebody else out there doing as badly - or worse - than you. Perseverance is a good habit to acquire.

Finally, after something like 1600 kilometres and 27 hours on the road, the final control of the 1998 Olde BP Rally loomed large on the horizon at Kyneton. All that remained was a transport stage to the finish at Diggers Rest on the outskirts of Melbourne where results were calculated over a hot meal and a long-

awaited drink.

It had been a long, demanding event but one which we'd thoroughly enjoyed. Our 10th outright was a dream result, something we'd hoped for but realistically didn't believe we could achieve. It just shows that in a long rally persistence is the key word. The Olde BP combined difficult navigation, challenging roads and a great feeling of camaraderie amongst the competitors. For those who dismiss navigational events as being events where top results can be too hit and miss, those who compete regularly enjoy the challenge of being able to use their considerable navigational skills to good effect. Congratulations to Bob Watson and his team for providing a worthy BP celebratory event. Roll on 2003 for the next one!



Final Results, Olde BP Rally, March 20-22.

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| 1. Terry Naish/Ross Runnalls (Datsun 1600) | 155 points |
| 2. Graham Wallis/Phil Nicholas (Peugeot 504) | 180 points |
| 3. Rob Devenish/Phil Wylie (Datsun 240Z) | 223 points |
| 4. Alan Upton/Mark Laidlay (Datsun 1000) | 229 points |
| 5. Peter Riseborough/Dave Smith (Cortina Mk.1) | 238 points |
| 6. Ted Perkins/Gerry Bashford (Holden HK) | 394 points |
| 7. Roger Lee/Matt Lee (Triumph 2.5) | 506 points |
| 8. Doug Fernie/Robin Smalley (Datsun 1600) | 518 points |
| 9. George Reynolds/Mike Osborne (Volkswagen) | 639 points |
| 10. Peter Whitten/Jeff Whitten (Mk.2 Escort) | 685 points |

